

Rocky Mountain News

Transportation funds may require innovation

By **Kevin Flynn**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published December 31, 2008 at 12:05 a.m.

Transportation officials need an additional \$1.5 billion each year just to catch up on the backlog of maintenance and projects, but lawmakers will be hard-pressed to find even \$250 million to fix crumbling bridges in 2009.

And if they did, that wouldn't even replace the \$400 million in state and federal highway money that the Colorado Department of Transportation will lose next year to the poor economy.

What is needed, many legislators and transportation analysts say, is an overhauled, outside-the-box approach to raising money for transportation. But, given the serious economic recession, don't expect lawmakers who meet in session next week to craft that comprehensive approach in a single package.

"It took a long time to get into this mess, and we're not going to get out of it in one year," said Rep. Joe Rice, D-Littleton. "We need meaningful structural changes in transportation funding.

"How do we get away from the gas tax?"

The gas tax, last raised in 1991, is based on gallons bought, not price. With inflation eating its buying power and fuel-efficient cars burning

less of it, the gas tax can't keep pace with the state's needs.

"When you have 17 years of a declining revenue source, I just don't know how you solve it in one year," said Rice. "We're not even trying to bring in more money; we're trying to make up some of what we're losing next year."

Restructuring the ancient gas-tax approach would most likely involve going to voters for new taxes or debt, and 2009 doesn't look like a friendly year for that.

"When you look at what's politically palatable in Colorado, raising the gas tax probably won't happen," said Rep. Terrance Carroll, incoming House speaker from Denver. "Just look at the elections we've had for schools."

Transportation visionaries see a variety of new and retooled approaches, many with the same user-pay basis as the gas tax, as future funding mechanisms. The most discussed is to tax motorists on a per-mile basis instead of per-gallon.

Other ideas are tolling, charging for driving certain roads at rush hours, privatizing new or existing transportation corridors to attract investment and bonding to accelerate work, such as was done for the T-REX project.

Rice said Republicans are working with Democrats, so even if many bills are filed, some may emerge as bipartisan proposals.

Advertisement

Office Liquidators is Now Offering Office Supplies

Office Liquidators has been Colorado's **Low Price Leader** for Office Furniture for 23 years and will now do the same with **Office Supplies!**

\$20 off
initial order of \$60
enter code PC2060

Still locally owned with the same **great service.**

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience

ORDER ONLINE
www.OfficeLiquidators.com

303-759-3375 11111W. 6th Ave/LAKEWOOD
Between Kipling & Simms

Hours: M-F 8:30 - 6:00, Sat 10-5, Sun 12-5

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

Rocky Mountain News

"Everybody is seriously interested in addressing the problem in a meaningful way," Rice said.

Bill proposals

Transportation

* **Bridges:** Rep. Joe Rice, D-Littleton, is in the thick of a bipartisan effort trying to address funding to repair bridges. Aiming to raise \$250 million a year, instead of simply raising everyone's annual car fees, Rice is looking at removing exemptions for some vehicles that now pay only \$3.

* **Overall funding:** Rice and others are trying to develop a comprehensive overhaul of transportation funding, which could include tolling, privatization, rationalization of special types of transportation revenue districts, and pay-by-the-mile taxes instead of the gas tax.

* **Seat belts:** Rice is considering a bill making failure to wear a seat belt a primary offense, meaning police could stop you for it. This is the last year during which Colorado can avoid losing \$20 million in federal funding that Washington withholds from states that don't have such laws.

Advertisement

Office Liquidators is Now Offering Office Supplies

Office Liquidators has been Colorado's **Low Price Leader** for Office Furniture for 23 years and will now do the same with Office Supplies!

Still locally owned with the same **great service.**

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience

ORDER ONLINE
www.OfficeLiquidators.com

\$20 off
initial order of \$60
enter code PC2060

303-759-3375 11111W. 6th Ave/LAKEWOOD
Between Kipling & Simms

Hours: M-F 8:30 - 6:00, Sat 10-5, Sun 12-5



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™